

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

HB 54: Authorizing Programs to Promote Responsible Gambling

Background

The comprehensive revision of gambling laws enacted by the 1989 Legislature provided a statement of "public policy concerning gambling." In this statement, the legislature declared it necessary to:

"(f) promote programs necessary to provide assistance to those who are adversely affected by legalized gambling, including compulsive gamblers and their families."
(MCA 23-5-110)

In the almost two decades since this law was enacted, attempts to pass legislation authorizing a state program or state funding to treat compulsive gambling have been unsuccessful. Most of the proposals have come from the Gaming Advisory Council (GAC). The Montana Council on Problem Gambling, a private nonprofit corporation, has provided the only organized effort to refer and provide treatment to problem gamblers. The Montana Council is funded primarily through gaming industry contributions.

Gambling Advisory Council Recommendations

Over the past 18 months, the Gaming Advisory Council considered proposals to provide public funding to support the Montana Council on Problem Gambling. However, after much discussion, the GAC instead recommended that:

- the policy of treating problem gamblers with private funds should be continued and the state should not be involved in funding treatment services, and
- the Gambling Control Division, the Montana Lottery and the gaming industry should pursue a joint public information program to promote responsible gambling and to inform those with gambling problems where they can get help.

Provisions of HB 54

The proposed legislation would:

- clarify the existing statement of public policy that, in addition to providing assistance to those adversely affected by legalized gambling, the state should promote public awareness of responsible gambling through the cooperative efforts of state and tribal governments that collect revenue from gaming, and
- clearly authorize the Department of Justice to administer programs and cooperate with other agencies to increase awareness of problem gambling and promote responsible gaming.

Fiscal Impact

Advertising contractors for the Montana Lottery estimate that a basic public information program would cost approximately \$85,000 a year. If the Montana Lottery, the Gambling Control Division and the gaming industry were to each provide one-third of the funding, the Gambling Control Division would need to add approximately \$28,500 to its budget from the gambling special revenue fund. The balance in the fund is adequate to easily cover this additional expenditure. The Montana Lottery would fund its contribution from the current level advertising budget. No general fund is requested.